



COMMENTS ON THE EPIC: SHARANUBASAVA: THE SCION OF MAHADASOA

Dr. Chidambar Patil

Retd. Associate Professor of English, Vijayapura, Karnataka

INTRODUCTION

After the ancient Hindu scriptures, the Vedas and the Upanishads began the epic age in Indian literature in general and Sanskrit literature in particular through "*The Ramayana*" and "*The Mahabharata*" representing the Hindu Sanatana Dharma. This concept reached the commonest of the people in India through the characters in these epics like Rama, Lakshman, Hanuman, Arjuna, Bhima Krishna, and a host of characters. Indian Literature is not free from the influence of these Indian epics. When we look into the history of writing epics in India in different languages, the number goes in hundreds.

The love and craze for the epics in this country can be seen in people like Pratap Chandra Rai, the publisher who published "*The Mahabharata*" translated into English in eleven volumes more than a hundred years ago by Kishori Mohan Ganguly. But Pratap Chandra Rai fell seriously ill and told his wife that she has to save the money which is meant for his funeral rites and bring out the last volume.

Pratap Chandra's wife accomplished the task and a year later the eighteen Parvas of the epic were available for the scholars to study, both in India and abroad. This is evidence of the love of the motherland and the inspiration of the epic narrative in India. It is necessary to understand that our epic narratives ancient or modern epitomize truly, not only Indian history but also Indian culture. These two epics have been reinterpreted by different writers with diverse perspectives for centuries. They have been a source of inspiration to Indian writers down the centuries.

What Sri Aurobindo truly said of "*The Mahabharata*",

"The whole poem has been built like a vast national temple unrolling slowly its immense and complex idea from chamber to chamber, crowded with significant groups and sculptures and inscriptions, the grouped figures carved in divine or semi-divine proportions, a humanity aggrandized and half uplifted to super-humanity and yet always true to the human motive and idea and feeling, the strain of the real constantly raised by the tones of the ideal, the life of this world amply portrayed but subjected to the conscious influence and presence of the powers of the worlds behind it, and the whole unified by the long embodied procession of a consistent idea worked out in the wide steps of the poetic story."

However, caste and gender have never been too oppressive for people who joined the stream of the Bhakti Movement. There was now a new infusion of strength for the local languages with

an increased vocabulary and a new, democratic approach to usage. All the Indian poets who came after Valmiki and Vyasa wrote epics based on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, but each epic differed in cast and choice of incidents. The individual talent was at work even as it drank deep in the springs of tradition.

Thus, devotional hymnology flowed throughout the centuries all over India as devotional epic structures. These Kavya's that rose between the 15th and 20th centuries are yet to be studied by academics, but the works have remained very much in popular attention and have been the educating agents for Indians till the dawn of the twenty-first century.

The long narrative, the epic cast, returned to its favoured place. All languages of India have produced thought-provoking, emotionally charged, brilliant epics in the twentieth century.

it comes to the discussion of the Occidents and the Orientalists, it can be said that the long poem in countries like India is not dead, unlike the Occident nations. The epic narrative has taken its position in novel form too. There is God's plenty here, poetry that is alive and that is vibrant. The myths and legends are still relevant for they can be brought to a contemporaneous idiom and used to interpret the problems faced by the modern man. But why epics? Why long poems? This is because a poet needs plentiful elbow space to state his problem and suggest some ways to solve the problem which imprisons man today in several ways.

Looking back on our classical myths and legends, it is wonderful to note how writers have been re-formatting these works to help women fight back. For example, Kuvempu has won lasting fame with his enthralling and bold recreation of the tale of Rama as a long epic running to more than twenty thousand lines. The testament of faith wins in the end. Thus, the 20th century has kept the flow of the long narrative alive, and even given it new hues.

The Indian poets of this century would do well to extend the firm buildings on hand and begin the task of putting together a shelf of neo-classical literature with a contemporaneous thrust. S. G. Dollegoudar, one such poet of the 21st century has elevated himself in the field of Indian English Literature, with his commendable epic work "*Sharanubasava: The Scion of Mahadasoha*." He has accomplished his mission on what he had been working on for the last two years with all his efforts, dedication, hard work and the blessings of Lord Sharanubasava.

The epic is characterized by its universal appeal, artistic expression, and the eternal pleasure a reader can get. It is said that great literature arouses sublime feelings in us and as Longinus says it elevates us and gives us a vaulting joy. It gives ultimately aesthetic pleasure. These wordings of Longinus are very much applicable to the present epic by Dollegoudar who has come out with a beautiful vision of Lord Sharanubasava.

When we deeply investigate the epic Matthew Arnold's statement comes to mind, "Poetry is simply the most delightful and perfect form of utterance that human words can reach." There are artistic expressions that illumine our hearts. The uniqueness of this epic is it is not just the life journey of Lord Sharanubasava as a common human being but a beautiful guide to the attainment of the spiritual journey leading to total liberation-Moksha through human service-Mahadasoha. As C. R. Yaravintelimath has rightly pointed out, "The epic written in a lucid language and a unique style, though adheres to free verse and adopts a narrative technique, yet it sways takes the readers under its fold. He finds the orderly and spiritual life of Sharanubasava. Everything that Sharana deals with always elevates to the sublime height. His soul expresses its profound concern for society. In this modern society, values have changed. Things are falling apart and nothing holds them together. But it is different where the spiritual power of Sharanubasava reigns." (xviii)

One cannot forget the famous line from "*Paradise Lost*" which Milton quotes as the reason for writing his epic, "To justify the ways of God to man." (Book 1. 24) Nevertheless, when it comes to the present epic it can be said that Dollegoudar is trying to establish, "The divine ways of God to man through Lord Sharanubasava who is in pursuit of the eternal truth of life." Therefore, we have to say that the epic revolves around the hero-the saint Sharanubasava. The epic deals with the birth of the hero till his last day of life. However, the writer himself expresses in his preface, "...but the epic on Sharana, though written with the aid of imagination, yet is based on a living human being amidst us just two hundred years ago. In his lifetime people could elevate him to this divine stage and started treading his path as their God the ideal. That is the beauty of the epic." (xxii)

The writer Dollegoudar through this epic has shown that a man can attain superhuman status and ultimately become God in the estimation of the people which has been amply demonstrated in the divine life of Sharanabasaveshwar. The same can be said with the eternal truth that Adi Shankaracharya has said, "Aham Bramham Asmi".

Niranjan Nisty has rightly pointed out, "Dr. Sannabasanagouda Dollegoudar has done a commendable job by composing an epic in English, the first of its kind in northern Karnataka on the divine life and message of Sharanabasaveshwar." (xxvi) It would not be an exaggeration if it is that this is the first of its kind in the whole of Karnataka probably in English other than reflecting the stories of "*The Ramayana*" and "*The Mahabharata*".

The present epic "*Sharanubasava: The Scion of Mahadasoha*" is written in five parts: Part I When the Divine Playfulness Unfolds is in 13 cantos; Part II The Fruits of the Divine Play is in 9 cantos; Part III Departure to *Parvataabad* (The Fruits of Divine) is in 4 cantos; Part-IV *Miracles after Miracles at Kalaburagi* (THE Miracles yield the Fruits) is in 28 cantos and Part-V *Miracles after Merger into the Cosmic Soul* is in 7 cantos.

People of north Karnataka know the life and deeds of Sharanabasaveshwar because the bulk of literature is available in Kannada and other languages and not in English. Perhaps this is again the first of its kind in English on the spiritual personality brought out in the epic form free from the reflections of "*The Ramayana*" and "*The Mahabharata*". The credit goes to Dollegoudar for making the readers enjoy the spiritual joy.

The present article is going to concentrate on just the first two Cantos of Part-I in short for it is difficult to discuss all the five parts in the shortest possible time.

The epic opens impressively with a humble prayer to Lord Sharanubasava,

"I, thy Sannabasava,
honouring thee
my Sharanubasava." (1)

The common aspect of the two names is the name, Basava. I feel that Sannabasava could write about Sharanubasava because the name Basava and the spiritual soul are already present in the man Sannabasava. Secondly, the part of the name Sannabasava- 'Sanna' in Kannada meant 'Small'. The writer speaks of himself as a small man putting all the effort into writing about the Giant Sharanubasava and finally becoming successful in completing the epic. He becomes an innocent child urging for the blessings of Sharanubasava and asking him to hold his little fingers like a child holding the finger of his father and guide him to complete this beautiful epic:

"Prayer of mine is in need of your
Grace's shelter,
As I need to empower
These little my fingers
To script
Thy
Saga of stunning life of spirituality!"

He further expresses that this epic is just:

"Lyrics! Pieces of my prayers!
or mere babbling of an infant!
And says,
"Your life I wish
Would be carved in words,
Thou makes no difference to thou but for me!"
Then asserts,
Your life there in verse
Though blank, but forever;"

He further tells how he was inspired by his master to compose this epic in humble expression:

“You visited me many moments
In nights fused with mystical moist.
I made efforts enough
To have darshan.
Then I made a verse of mine
And confine
Thou in my simple expression. (2)

The poet with his thoughts and ideas makes us understand the traditional belief in Indian philosophy that unless one surrenders to the divine completely one cannot attain realization and total liberation:

“My mind now softer than ever before
Is more sombre and mature for thy serve.
So lo! All is at your divine feet.” (3))

The poet expresses that unless there is total surrender one cannot attain spirituality. And further, he humbly and innocently like a child says:

“Accept it my lord
As a humble pie from thy
Little living being!” (5)

As expressed by Lord Krishna in the “Bhagwad Gita”

“Yada yadaya dharmas.....
..... Yuge, yuge.”

Part-I Canto 1 begins with the description of the sullen world by Naarad: a realistic picture of the world presented beautifully by the poet in impressive poetic language and lucid style:

‘I have come from the sullen earth
To the world of eternity’.
I have a tale of woes
To part with you,
But with a heavy heart my lord!” (14)

And the need for a saviour:

“I dare not speak before
Neelakhanta any ill
The news that sounds not
From the earth that well’
The things are really falling apart
The centre holds them not intact.
The earthly people need immediate
Solace for not being swept
Away by the immoral and sinful!” (14)

Naarada exposes the humans on the earth and their ravenousness and speaks to the lord:

“Suppressed are all the devotees,
Declared he,
Gone up is the rate of pestering
By mongers of materialism,
Assaulting and abusing
They the devout devotees,
Spared are not even
The worshippers of Gurulinga!

And further says in surprise,

“I know not what planet earth is plagued of!” (15)

He then expresses how the people have ignored spiritual practices and surrendered themselves to materialism:

“Practice they not the spirit of Panchacharas;
Provide they not space for Shatastalas;
Immoral and impious they are
And have let loose anarchy there
On the planet Earth,
Dearly loved by Lord thou.” (15)

The poet is giving the cause for the possible ways of incarnation to protect the good and punish the evil by converting them into divine followers. An epic should use supernatural elements and Dollegoudar has used divine characters in the epic.

Naarada pleads to Lord Maheshwara that the earthly people are to be protected from evil activities and evil thinking and change their minds and thinking towards the divine and implores:

“My lord,
You are the saviour of the destitute,
You are the one
With boundless compassion,
And the one whose
Name is chanted by everyone.
Implore you I
To rush to the planet Earth right away.” (17)

The poet Dollegoudar also speaks of the traditional method adopted by the then people who used to talk through the minds which today we call the telepathy method. Even today there are many people and saints in India and abroad who practice this method of conversation with people at a distance. The poet speaks of this telepathy method between Shiva and Nandish:

“Look! Telepathy is at work
This ultra-sensory perception
Impelled Nandish to suddenly present himself at Shiva’s court.” (18)

The poet also brings out the relationship between Shiva and Nandish and how difficult it is for them to part with each other and Nandish interrogates:

“How can I depart
From the company of thy comfort

to the earth
 where then thou art absent?
 How can I prefer hell
 Discarding the heaven?
 How can I dwell
 In the company of the wicked souls? (19)

One of the important epic conventions is the aspect of journey: the first journey we find is of Nandi from the abode of heaven to the land of Karnataka. The poet Dollegoudar states that this journey of Nandi is of two folds: firstly, it was a journey to the physical topography of Karnataka and secondly, the real inward journey to realize oneself and the assignment given to him by Lord Shiva. For Nandi, it was a stirring journey:

“Oh! What a stirring journey
 A lifetime merry,
 Journey from Rajatagiri
 Led to valley of Charugiri
 Garden,
 While arriving witnessed
 He the Saptasharadi Island,
 Then spotted
 He the Saaraajambudweep in the middle.” (23-24)

He then says it was a journey to introspect and realize oneself”

“as it was not a journey
 Of physical topography
 Oh! It was an inward journey too.
 Deep into oneself
 That led to searching of Self!
 It was no less a pilgrimage! (24)

The poet presents the then-peaceful Karnataka as:

“A country that is testimony
 To peace, tranquillity, and prosperity!

And says,

“Oh! Even God envied this place
 and longed to dwell there eternally,” (24)

The reason for this envy is not because it is a country of peace and prosperity but,

“Look this land is
 Sanctified
 By Shivasharanas habituation
 And also a nestling
 Venue of saints” (24)

The people of Aralugundagi were in absolute joy, whereas the Sharana couples lived in the form of Aadeppa and Madiyamma who led a life of values. The poet while speaking about Lord Shankara's appearance in the dream of the Sharana couple presents the words of the Lord with beautiful use of alliteration:

“A day divine descending down
 To soother souls of Sharanas.” (31)

The poet says that the incarnations on this earth are for the welfare of the whole society and not any one legacy:

“The child divine
 Though born in your womb
 Belongs not alone
 To legacy of your.
 Born is he
 Only through you
 For a cause higher
 Yet that is holier!
 And belongs not to you! (35).

The reflection of Mahabharatha/Baghawathum can be seen when it comes to the birth of Sharnanbasava which is like the birth of Lord Krishna. Devaki gave birth to Lord Krishna but he was brought up by Ashodha. Similar is the case with the life of Sharanubasava: Sangamma gave birth to Sharanubasava and handed over the child to her elder sister Madiyamma. The child was born to Sangamma, and as per the wish of Lord Shiva handed the child into the arms of Madiyamma and it is said that suddenly mother's milk spilt out from her breast. Her joy knew no bounds. She felt herself blessed.

In Canto II the poet brings back to us the memory of the Gurukula system. No child was easily admitted to Gurukula unless he was tested. The same happened in the case of Sharanubasava and the Guru was brimming with joy after the test:

“Guru was brimming with
 Joyful pride to declare so.
 Oh! My Child incarnate
 Of Shivachaar and Sadaachar,
 You are the affluent of virtues,
 Lo! This moment I initiate
 You to the religious
 Consecration—the Deeksha.” (52)

The life of Sharanubasava is a role model to the whole world. His life is the real message to this world.

I would like to appreciate the poet for making use of a powerful paradox. I am quoting just one example from Canto -2: like Wordsworth in his short poem “The Rainbow” where Wordsworth expresses the paradox:

“The child is the father of the man”

Similarly, in canto two the poet Dollegoudar while describing the conversation between Sharanubasava and his Guru regarding the Deeksha brings out a beautiful paradoxical statement through Sharanubasava's Guru:

“The child can defeat the father”

So in a short time, it is a herculean task to speak out about the

epic. Perhaps it needs not less than a day to speak on one canto. Remember I am not speaking of one book but of one canto.

To conclude, I can say that this epic is a beautiful reflection of Dasoha: the selfless service to God; the concept of a spiritual teacher: Guru, the Prana: the breath of life which we practice in meditation; salvation what is called Nirvana; Kayaka: the fruit of labour; the concept of trinity: Guru-Linga-Jangama i.e. Teacher-God-Godly man; the concept of Shatastala i.e. is six stages of Bhakti: diligence, unwaveringness, intentness, enlightenment, beatitude and absoluteness. It can also be said that every human being aims to understand and realize the concept of Pranajangama i.e. the life breath within us creates a spiritual abode and finally attain total liberation. Only the incarnations like Sharanubasava can guide us in these aspects.

Finally, it would not be an exaggeration if I said that I believe that saintly people do not give birth. They visit this earth to protect the Sharanas and after fulfilling the goal they have been assigned then return to heaven. So is the case with Sharanubasava. He came on to this earth to fulfil the order of Lord Shankara. Performed his duties and assigned work and returned to heaven. Now the question is if Sharanubasava has returned to heaven then where he dwells at present? It is in Dasoha as poet Dollegoudar puts it in his epilogue:

“Dasoha is the breath and finer spirit
Of Sharana’s clan.
Dasoha is his sacrosanct
Dasoha is the chosen path,
Dasoha pervades there.

.....

Dwells he, not elsewhere, but in Dasoha.
Words speak nothing but of Dasoha deeds. (523)

I showed to a little extent that this epic’s approach to its core religious ideal of the ancient Indian dharma of Dasaho which has been encapsulated by the poet and is embedded in the epic. Such poems transcend the times and places of their makings, by meeting religious needs that human beings still have today. Whenever they encounter the epics, readers can find existential comfort as their heroes counter by kléos the uncertainty that death threatens and defeats by dharma the forces of increasing immorality, whether these paradigms achieve their ideals easily or not. Readers, by internalizing the stories of such heroes and by imitating their endeavours to some extent, can incorporate into their own identities those ancient narratives and paragons. We must accept what Poojya Sharanabasawappa Appaji has asserted, “The work is more relevant to society than ever before as the world is facing increased tension, crises of identity, the threat of disintegration, and ears among the countries for global hegemony, together have all made the writer’s role and his creative work more vital.” (xiv)

REFERENCES

1. Do Dr. Dollegoudar, S. G, “Sharanubasava: The Scion of Mahadasoha” Sharnbasva University, Kalaburgi. 2022
2. Aurobindo, Foundations of Indian Culture, digitallibraryindia; JaiGyan Item no. 15972834. 1953

3. Milton John, “Paradise Lost” USBPD New Delhi, 2012
4. Wordsworth, Williams, The Rainbow, “Selected Poems of Wordsworth”, Macmillan Annotated Classics, Madras, 1977